

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 SY-05 HA-05 COME-00 ACDA-12 /089 W
-----031620 232113Z /64

R 231627Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7486
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS UK
SUBJECT: MURDER AND KIDNAPPING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: BELFAST 110

CONGEN BELFAST DRAFTED THIS MESSAGE JUNE 20.

SUMMARY: THE PROVISIONAL IRAS JUNE 17 KILLING OF ONE POLICEMAN, THE WOUNDING, APPARENT ABDUCTION AND KILLING OF THE POLICEMAN'S COMPANION, AND THE 12-HOUR ABDUCTION OF A CATHOLIC PRIEST AS HOSTAGE MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS BIZARRE WERE IT NOT SO TRAGIC. THE EVENTS ARE STILL OBSCURE AND MAY NEVER BE CLARIFIED. CLEARLY PIRA HAS INTENSIFIED ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SECURITY FORCES, BUT WE DOUBT IT HAS DECIDED TO START KIDNAPPING AS A REGULAR TACTIC. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MEDIA HAVE AMPLY COVERED THE PIRA SHOOTING JUNE 17 OF TWO POLICEMEN LURED INTO AN AMBUSH IN SOUTH ARMAGH. THE AREA IS A FEW MILES FROM THE SOUTHERN BORDER AND HAS PROVED DIFFICULT TO PACIFY. ONE POLICE- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MAN WAS KILLED OUTRIGHT. THE POLICE BELIEVE THE OTHER WAS SERIOUSLY WOUNDED WHEN HE WAS TAKEN AWAY BY PIRA, AND MAY HAVE DIED FROM HIS WOUNDS. THE PROVISIONALS INITIALLY ANNOUNCED HE HAD BEEN TAKEN FOR QUESTIONING, THEN YESTERDAY (JUNE 19) THAT THEY HAD KILLED HIM. AN INTENSIVE SEARCH IS ON FOR THE KILLERS AND THE BODY. THE FORMER MAY BE EASIER TO FIND THAN THE LATTER, AND

ALL COULD BE OVER THE OPEN BORDER.

2. IN A TIT-FOR-TAT ACTION, UNKNOWN MEN ABDUCTED CATHOLIC PRIEST HUGH MURPHY JUNE 18. MESSAGES PURPORT-EDLY FROM THE ULSTER FREEDOM FIGHTERS (AN EXTREMIST OFFSHOOT OF THE EXTREME LOYALIST PARAMILITARY GROUP, ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE) SAID THE PRIEST WOULD BE HELD AS HOSTAGE AND SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS THE KIDNAPPED CONSTABLE. BUT THE MEN RELEASED FATHER MURPHY AFTER 12 HOURS OF UNCOMFORTABLE BUT COURTEOUS CAPTIVITY. THE UFF SAID THEY HAD NOT BEEN RESPONSIBLE AND THREATENED DEATH TO THOSE WHO HAD TAKEN THEIR NAME IN VAIN.

3. PUBLIC INDIGNATION IS HIGH. THE CATHOLIC AND CHURCH OF IRELAND PRIMATES MADE STRONG STATEMENTS, AND REV. IAN PAISLEY APPEALED FOR FATHER MURPHY'S RELEASE. IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, SEVERAL OTHER PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED OR SUFFERED TIT-FOR-TAT ATTEMPTS THESE DAYS, AND THERE HAS BEEN SOME STREET VIOLENCE.

4. COMMENT: THE POLICE BELIEVE THAT PIRA RESTRICTED ITS ACTIVITY UNTIL THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT WAS PUBLISHED LAST WEEK, AND THEN SHARPENED THEIR CAMPAIGN. SO MANY KILLING ATTEMPTS BARELY FAIL THAT WE SOMETIMES ARE TEMPTED TO THINK PIRA DELIBERATELY OR SUBCONSCIOUSLY MISSES. THIS ATTACK ON THE POLICEMEN WAS COLD BLOODEDLY
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DELIBERATE. SENIOR POLICE OFFICIALS RECENTLY HAVE BEEN

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

ICA-11 SY-05 HA-05 COME-00 ACDA-12 /089 W

-----031631 232115Z /64

R 231627Z JUN 78

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GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC IN THEIR COMMENTS TO US, BUT THEY ALLOW FOR SUCH CONTINUING OUTRAGES.

5. THE APPARENT KIDNAPPING OF THE CONSTABLE POSED THE QUESTION WHETHER PIRA HAD DECIDED TO BEGIN USING THAT TACTIC. THE IMPLICATIONS WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE. PIRA HAS KIDNAPPED RARELY, AND THE LAST ONE IN NORTHERN IRELAND WAS IN THE EARLY 1970S. BECAUSE OF THE AMBIGUOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, THE QUICK ADMISSION OF KILLING, AND THE DIFFICULTIES OF HANDLING THE KIDNAPPED, WE CONSIDER IT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT.

6. FATHER MURPHY PROBABLY WAS TAKEN BY LOYALISTS (THE UFF, A SIMILAR EXTREME GROUP, OR UNAFFILIATED INDIVIDUALS), ALTHOUGH THERE IS SPECULATION THAT PIRA DID IT AS A PROVOCATION. PRESUMABLY THE SHARP PUBLIC REACTION AND PAISLEY'S VIGOROUS STATEMENT SHOWED THE LOYALISTS THEIR ERROR. FATHER MURPHY'S PARISH IS IN HEAVILY PROTESTANT TERRITORY. IN SEEMING PARADOX, HE IS KNOWN AS ONE OF THE FEW PRIESTS IN NI WHO IS PUBLICLY LOYAL

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TO THE QUEEN. HE WAS A ROYAL NAVY CHAPLAIN AND PARTICIPATES IN PATRIOTIC CEREMONIES. EXTREME LOYALISTS WOULD CONSIDER HIM PRESUMPTIOUS. END COMMENT.

7. ADDENDUM JUNE 21: SECURITY FORCES SCORED A MAJOR SUCCESS LATE LAST NIGHT WHEN THEY STAKED OUT A POST OFFICE IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST OUTSIDE THE SECURITY BARRIER. ACCORDING TO EARLY REPORTS, SOLDIERS KILLED FOUR MEN AND WOUNDED ANOTHER, AND RECOVERED SEVERAL BLAST-INCENDIARY BOMBS. UNFORTUNATELY, APPARENTLY ONE OF THE MEN KILLED AND THE ONE WOUNDED WERE PASSERS-BY. BECUASE OF THE NATURE OF THE OPERATION AND THE HARM TO INNOCENTS, THERE IS BOUND TO BE CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM OF THE ARMY FROM REPUBLICANS. FOR THE TERRORISTS, HOWEVER, SUCH A DEFEAT IS A MAJOR BLOW: IT PRESUMABLY MEANS THE SECURITY FORCES WERE OPERATING ON THE BASIS OF INFORMATION SUPPLIED FROM INSIDE, AND NOTHING IS MORE DEVASTATING FOR THOSE PENETRATED.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MURDER, KIDNAPPING
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LONDON10004
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780262-1032
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780626/aaaaawkt.tel
Line Count: 172
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: bc82a182-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 BELFAST 110
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2229106
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MURDER AND KIDNAPPING IN NORTHERN IRELAND
TAGS: PINS, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bc82a182-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014